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Corrections' chase team dogs put noses to test

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KISATCHIE NATIONAL FOREST -- Dusty's nose hit the ground as soon as he crossed the gravel road, swinging his head from side to side searching for the scent.

It had been more than an hour since the man had entered the Kisatchie about five miles from Georgetown, but Dusty was on his trail, with Lt. Jody Floyd walking briskly behind him.

"Find him!" Floyd said as he traipsed through the woods. "Hunt him up!"

Less than 25 minutes later, Dusty, flanked by Floyd and three other members of the J. Levy Dabadie Correctional Center's Chase Team, lumbered out of the forest, successfully finding their man.

Dabadie was one of 11 statewide Department of Corrections' chase teams to participate in the Louisiana Department of Corrections Manhunt Field Trials this week.

"This competition gives institutions statewide a chance to train, catch up with one another and swap ideas," Floyd said of the competition, which started Tuesday and ended Thursday with the team he led placing fourth. "... This also gives us a chance to show off what our dogs can do after training all year."

Members of the J. Levy Dabadie Correctional Center Team (from left) Msgt. Chad Wiley, Lt. Jody Floyd, Msgt. Chad Chelette and Lt. Donnie Bordelon and their dog, Dusty, walk out of the woods at the end of competition. (Leandro Huebner/The Town Talk)



Each team runs two trails about a mile long, one during the day and another at night, said Maj. James Paul, competition coordinator and Dabadie's Chase Team commander. Teams have an hour to complete the trail and retrieve the three or four flags placed on the trail, he said.

And for each flag the team finds, it is able to deduct one minute off of its final time, which is stopped when the members find the "trail layer," or the person who walked out the trail the bloodhound followed.

Before Thursday morning's trail run, Dabadie's team wasn't talking strategy, just doing its best to relax as the minutes ticked down to the 8 a.m. start.

"You just have to trust the dog," Dabadie's Lt. Donnie Bordelon said.

The team members said they have to depend on the training that both they and the dog receive. Once they are on the trail, it is up to Dusty.

Dabadie Master Sgt. Chad Chelette said competition hunts help them with the real thing -- whether it be a missing child or an escaped inmate they are tracking.

"Being out here with these guys, it helps me know that in a real chase that I can trust them, depend on them," he said.

"We are training for the real deal," Bordelon said.

One of the best parts of these events for Dabadie's Master Sgt. Chad Wiley is the competition -- bragging rights. But he also said he sees the importance of the training and preparation.

"Being out here in the woods," he said citing the struggles of the thick underbrush, oftentimes inclement weather and risky elements such as snakes, "all that prepares us for what we could run into."

Maj. James Arnold, commander of Steve Hoyle Rehabilitation Center's Chase Team, which placed third, said the team's place in the competition may hold weight for bragging rights, but the most important thing is to "make the catch."

"As long as you make the catch, if the dog is doing that, you and the dog are doing fine," Arnold said. "You are proving that the dog can do what he is supposed to do."

Manhunt Field Trial Times

Final times for day and night trails:

- First Place: Rayburn Correctional Center -- 27 minutes and 30 seconds
- Second Place: Dixon Correctional Center -- 38 minutes and 11 seconds
- Third Place: Steve Hoyle Rehabilitation Center -- 49 minutes and 48 seconds
- Fourth Place: J. Levy Dabadie Correctional Center -- 50 minutes and 55 seconds